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The Impact of Role Models on Academic and Social Outcomes in Adolescents in Thailand

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Abstract

This research explores the influence of role models on the academic interest, social behavior, confidence, and emotional well-being of adolescents in Thailand. Using a structured survey distributed online, data were collected from 135 adolescents aged 13–18. The results indicate that a significant majority of adolescents (79.2%) have role models, with celebrities and artists being the most frequently identified. Adolescents with role models reported lower engagement in risky behaviors, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, and higher levels of confidence and happiness compared to those without role models. However, academic interest was slightly lower among adolescents with role models, possibly due to the prominence of non-academic figures such as celebrities, whose success may be perceived as independent of educational achievement. These findings highlight the multifaceted role of role models in adolescent development and emphasize the importance of promoting role models who embody positive values, resilience, and academic or professional integrity to support adolescents' holistic growth and aspirations.

Keywords: Academic Outcomes, Role Model, Social Outcomes

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period in which individuals begin to form a sense of identity, values, and aspirations. During this time, role models often play a pivotal role in shaping adolescent behavior, attitudes, and outcomes. A role model is typically defined as someone whose behavior, example, or success can be emulated by others, particularly younger individuals (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). These figures may include parents, teachers, celebrities, or peers, and their influence can significantly impact both academic engagement and social development.

Academic outcomes refer to measurable educational achievements such as grades, test scores, and skill acquisition, which are commonly used indicators of students' academic progress and performance (Fiveable, 2025). Social outcomes, on the other hand, encompass a range of interpersonal skills and emotional competencies, including

communication, empathy, teamwork, and the ability to build healthy relationships (IGI Global, 2025). Together, these outcomes provide a holistic picture of adolescent development.

Numerous studies have emphasized the impact of role models on youth development. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, individuals, particularly adolescents, learn behaviors and values by observing and imitating others, especially those they admire or view as successful. Role models can either reinforce positive behaviors, such as persistence and academic focus, or promote harmful patterns, depending on the values they exemplify (Choi & Pak, 2006).

A study by Cureus (2022) found that adolescents who identified family members or adult peers as role models were more likely to exhibit positive academic interest, safer behavior, and higher happiness scores compared to those who admired celebrities or same-age peers. This suggests that the closeness and relatability of a role model play a significant role in shaping adolescents' internal motivation and behavior.

Similarly, research conducted in urban Los Angeles revealed that adolescents who had identifiable role models—especially known individuals like parents or mentors—showed higher self-esteem, better academic performance, and reduced substance use (Yancey, Siegel, & McDaniel, 2002). This highlights the protective function of positive role models in navigating complex psychosocial environments.

In the context of Thailand, adolescents are increasingly exposed to a diverse range of role models through traditional and digital media. However, the extent to which different types of role models influence academic motivation and social outcomes in Thai adolescents remains underexplored. This research aims to examine the relationship between role models and key academic and social indicators among Thai adolescents aged 13–18. By identifying the types of role models adolescents look up to and analyzing associated behavioral and emotional outcomes, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social influences shape youth development in Thailand.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The method that was used was a survey. The survey was about The Impact of Role Models on Academic and Social Outcomes in Adolescents. The target of this survey is adolescents from age 13-18/Grade 7-12 and some others for example college students or working. The researchers spread the online questionnaire, using google form link, throughout online platform including researchers' school LINE groups, Instagram channels, and sending directly to friends in age range mentioned. We have informed the respondents that this questionnaire is anonymous and guarantees the confidentiality of the data collection.

2.2. Data collection

This questionnaire form was divided into 7 Sections:

- First; Screening questions to screen if they understand the word role model or not. (Figure 1).
- Second; is to identify if they have a role model or not and if they do, who is they e.g., Family member, Celebrity, Public/Altruistic figure, Same-age peer and Adult Acquaintance. (Figure 2,3)
- Third; Demographic; asking about age, gender and households (who do they live with) (Figure 4,5,6,7)
- Fourth; Interest in Education, describing grades in school in A, B, C, D or GPA (1.00-4.00). (Figure 8)
- Fifth; Risky behavior; Smoking, asking how frequent and Drinking alcohol: In 30 days, how many days that they have drunk alcohol. (Figure 9,10,11,12)
- Sixth; Confidence and self-Esteem; If they are happy with themselves, taking a positive attitude towards themselves, feeling useless at times, wish to have more respect for themselves, Feeling that they're a failure. The choices for answering were: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Moderate, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree. (Figure 13)

- Seventh; Happiness Score; Their life is good at the moment, having problems but are dealing with it, confused about what is going on in life, learning from their mistakes and getting all the help they need. The choices are scaling from 1-5; 1= None at all, 2= Slightly, 3=Moderate, 4=Much, 5=Most. And also, how important family, friends and teachers are. The scaling is very important, somewhat important, neutral and not important. (Figure 14,15)

2.3. Analyzing of Data

The way to analyze the results is to find the mean, by adding up the all-range score in that category (Interest in education, Risky behavior, Confidence score, Happiness score) and divide by the group of people that have role model (107 people) and the group that have no role model (28 people). And compare means between groups.

3. Findings/Results

From the first question that was in the screening section, do you understand what Role Model is? From the responses of 174 people who have responded, 39 respondents don't understand what role models are. So, there are 135 responses that can be used.

After asking the question Do you have Role Model? Respondents can be separated into 2 groups: Having Role Model (107 people) and No Role Model (28 people).

It can be concluded that: (Table 1)

- Interest in education: Groups that have role models, have the average interest in education of 3.44. While groups that have no role model, have 3.55. For this behavior it can be concluded that Having Role model, has a lower education interest.
- Risky behavior (smoking and drinking alcohol): Groups that have role models, have the average of risky behavior at 1.14. While the group that has no role model has 1.20. Can conclude that having a Role model lowers risky behavior.
- Confidence: Group with a role model has a confidence score of 3.59. While groups with no role model have the average of 3.48. This means that having a role model has higher confidence.
- Happiness: Group that have a Role model, have a happiness score of 3.44. While the other group, which has no Role model, has the score at 3.26. So, it can be concluded that having Role model has higher happiness.

Behavior	Group1 (Have Role model) n= 107	Group2 (No Role model) n = 28	
Interest in education	3.44	3.55	Have Role model have lower education interest
Risky Behavior	1.14	1.20	Have Role model have lower risky behavior
Confidence Score	3.59	3.48	Have Role model have higher confidence
Happiness Score	3.44	3.26	Have Role model have higher happiness

Table 1: Role Model Impacting Behaviors on different groups

Starting off with the screening question, do they understand what is “Role Model”, the results turn out that from 174 people who filled up the survey understand what is Role Model 77.6% and the other 22.4% don't. If they click “No”, the survey will end. So, with that, it is left with 135 people.

Do you understand what is "Role Model"? คุณรู้จักคำว่า บุคคลต้นแบบมั๊ย
คำตอบ 174 ข้อ

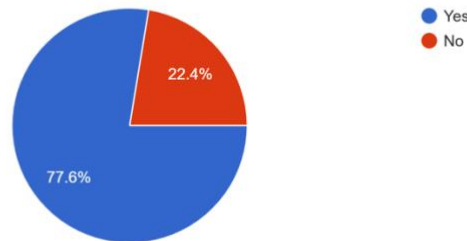


Figure 1: Pie Chart containing percentage whether they understand what is role model

From this question, 79.2% do have a role model which is 107 people. Other, 20.8% do not have a Role model which is 28 people.

Do you have "Role model"? คุณมีบุคคลต้นแบบในใจไหม
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

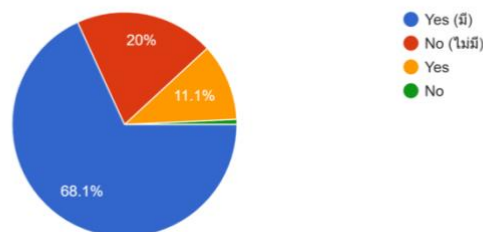


Figure 2: Respondents having role model or not

Based on people who have Role Model, results from the bar graph shows that the majority of people have Celebrity/Artists/Idol as the role model the most. Following with Family Members, next from family members is Public/Altruistic Figure, then Adult Acquaintance. Lastly, Same Age Peer which seems to be the least chosen role model.

If Yes, then who are they? Please specify who is your role model ถ้ามี บุคคลต้นแบบของคุณคือใคร
คำตอบ 107 ข้อ

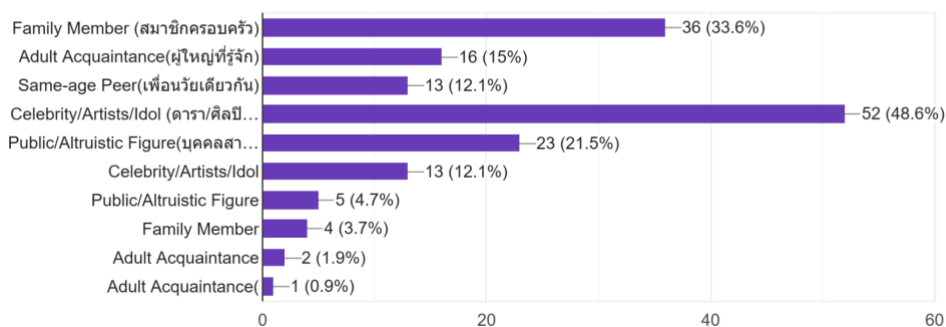


Figure 3: Who is the role model of the respondents

From the Pie Chart, it shows that people that have filled up this survey, how old are they.

The age 17 seems to be the majority age that people have when filling up this survey. From that age 16, 15 comes after. Age 18 and following with others; which may be above age 18, for example college students. The least age that filled up this survey is 14 and 13.

Age (อายุ)

คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

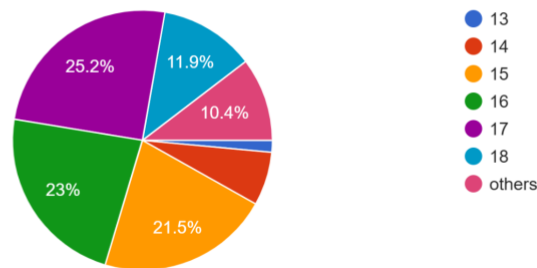


Figure 4: Respondents age

This graph shows the grade level of respondents. Most of the respondents are in grade 12/Year 13/ม.6. Following from that is grade 10/Year 11/ม.4, grade 11/Year 12/ม.5, others, grade 9/Year 10/ม.3. The least grade that respondents are from is grade 8/Year 9/ม.2.

Grade (ชั้นเรียน)

คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

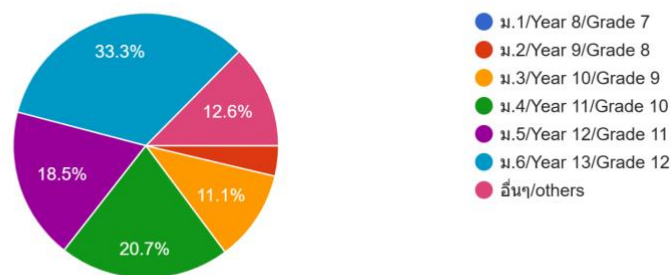


Figure 5: Respondent's grade levels

This graph presents the households of each respondent. From 126 respondents, the majority live with both of their parents/guardians and half from that majority live with 1 of their parents/guardians. The least household chosen is split time between two parents/guardians.

Household (สมาชิกในครอบครัว) (Optional)

คำตอบ 126 ข้อ

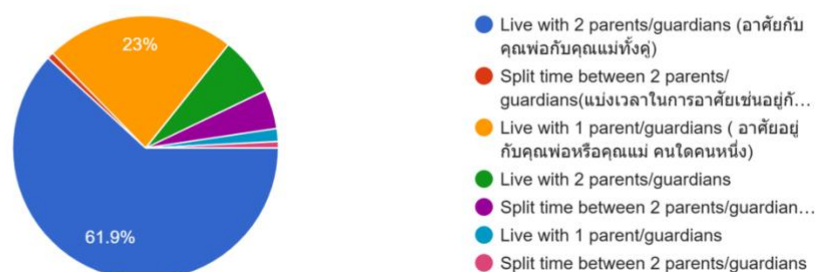


Figure 6: Respondent's households

This pie chart presents the gender of the respondents filling up this survey. Majority of the respondents are Female. Male is only 23% and non-binary is less than that.

Gender (เพศ)
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

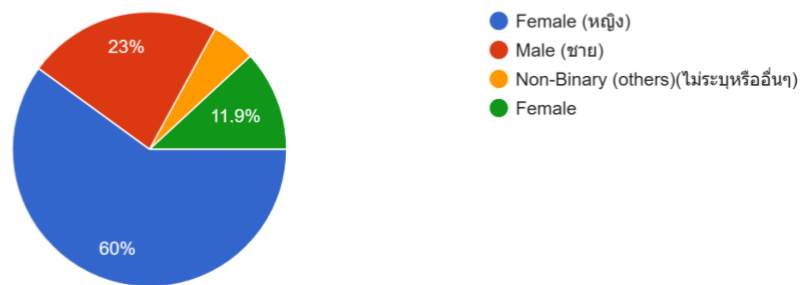


Figure 7: Respondent's gender

Half of the respondents would describe their grade as mostly B+'s/3.50. 24.4% of the respondents describe their grade mostly A's/4.00 and 17.8% would describe their grade as mostly B's/3.00. Only a few respondents describe their grade mostly C+'s/2.50 and mostly C's/2.00.

How would you describe your grades in school? เกรดเฉลี่ยในโรงเรียนประมาณเท่าไร
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

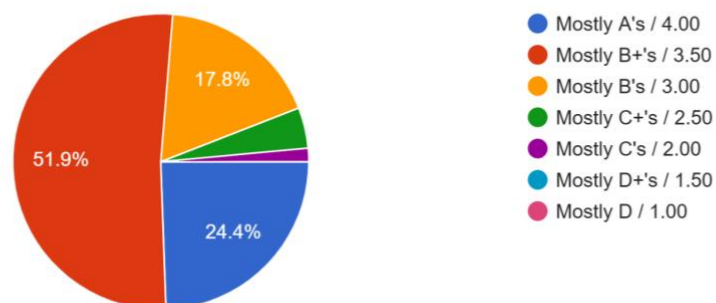


Figure 8: Interest in education, describing respondent's grade in school

This pie chart presents if the respondents have ever smoked cigarettes or electronic cigarettes. It could be seen that the majority of the respondents have never smoked cigarettes or e-cigarettes before. Only a small portion smoke cigarettes or e-cigarettes.

Have you ever smoke cigarettes or electronic cigarettes? เคยสูบบุหรี่หรือบุหรี่ไฟฟ้ามั้ย
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

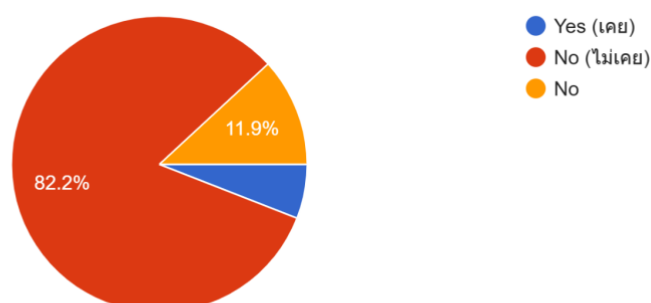


Figure 9: Risky behaviour, whether the respondents have ever smoked cigarettes or not.

If yes, this graph presents the frequency of smoking. 94.1% have not smoked at all. Only in a small percentage that have slightly smoke, moderate and much.

If Yes, How frequent is it? ถ้าเคย บ่อยแค่ไหน
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

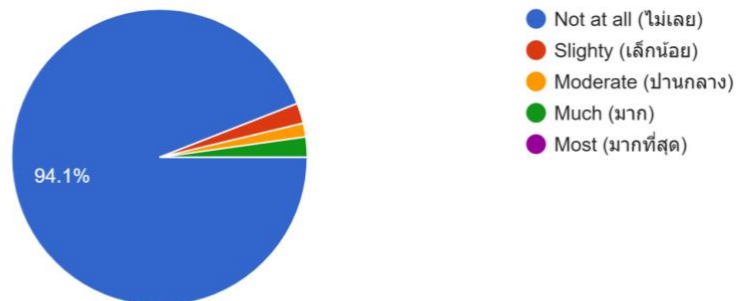


Figure 10: How frequent did the respondents smoke

This graph shows whether the respondents have ever drunk alcohol or not. It could be seen that respondents who have not drunk alcohol are more than respondents that have drunk alcohol.

Have you ever drink alcohol? เคยดื่มแอลกอฮอล์มั้ย
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

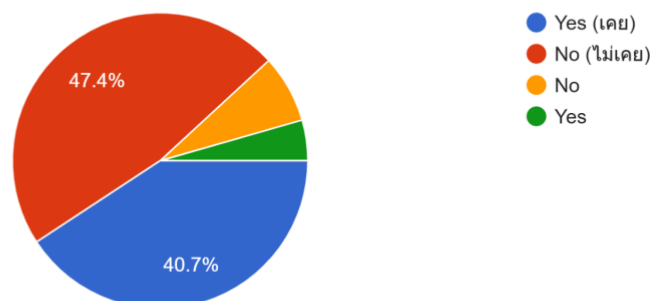


Figure 11: Risky behaviour, have the respondent's have ever drink alcohol

From the respondents that have answered yes for drinking alcohol, this questions as in during the past 30 days, how many days that they have at least one drink of alcohol. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents have not drunk any alcohol during the past 30 days. Some may have drunk in the past 1 to 5 days and slightly 6 to 19 days.

If Yes, During the past 30 days, how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol? ถ้าเคย
ในระหว่าง 30 วันที่ผ่านมา คุณดื่มเครื่องดื่มแอลกอฮอล์ไปแล้วกี่วัน
คำตอบ 135 ข้อ

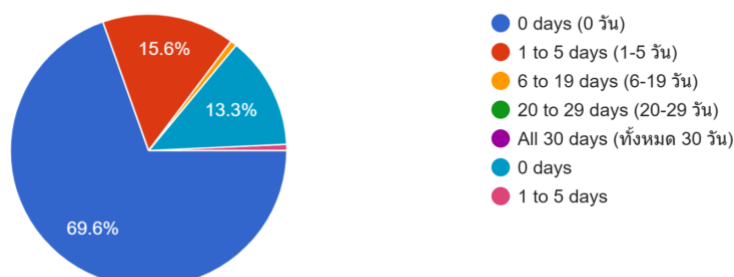


Figure 12: Days of having at least one drink, in the past 30 days

This graph presents the respondents Confidence/Self-Esteem Score. The choices were Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Moderate, Agree, Strongly Agree.

- On the whole, I am happy with myself: Majority are feeling moderate on themselves, but also there are some people who are agreeing and strongly agreeing. Though, there are some that disagree and slightly strongly disagree.
- I certainly feel useless at times: Similar to the first phrase, respondents feel moderate on feeling useless at times. The trend of disagree and agree are slightly different but agree is a bit lower than disagree. Some of the respondents do strongly disagree but still left with groups that strongly agree.
- I wish I could have more respect for myself: The highest trend is agreeing that the respondents wish they could have more respect for themselves. Feeling moderate and strongly agree are very close to being equal as same as disagree and strongly disagree. Though moderate and disagree are slightly higher.
- All in all, I feel that I am a failure: Moderate has the highest trend again, disagree and strongly disagree comes with a similar trend but disagree is slightly higher. Some of the respondents agree and a few strongly agree on feeling that they are a failure.
- I take positive attitude toward myself: Moderate and agree are in a similar trend but having agree slightly higher. Strongly agree comes next in the trend from the highest trend. Although, some disagree and a very few strongly disagree.

Confidence/Self-Esteem score ความมั่นใจในตัวเอง

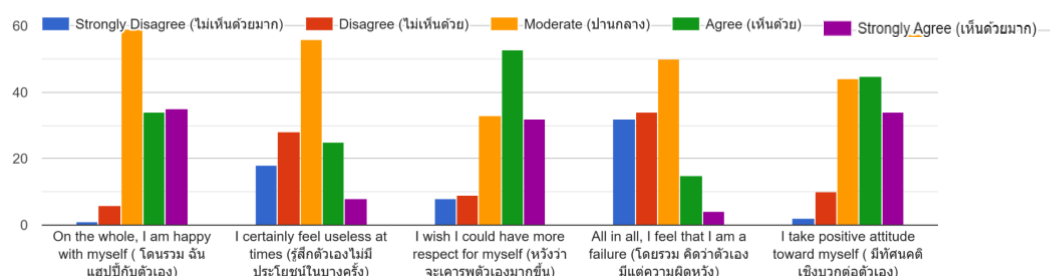


Figure 13: Confidence and self-esteem score of respondents

This graph represents the respondent's happiness score. The choices were divided into five; none at all, slightly, moderate, much, and most.

- Life is good for me at the moment: Most of the respondents feel moderate about their life whether it's good for them at the moment, also with the following trend; respondents feel much and most that their life is good at the moment. Although some disagree and very few none at all.
- I have a big problem but am dealing with them: Similar to the first phrase, respondents feel moderate about having a big problem but are dealing with it. The following trend is feeling slightly but there's still some that feels much and most. But also, there are some who feel none at all.
- I get confused about what is going on with life: In this phrase, the trends of feeling moderate and slightly comes nearly equal to each other but feeling moderate is a bit higher than slightly. Although there are some respondents who feel much and most (in a small trend) confused about what is going on with life. Though some respondents feel none at all.
- I learn from my mistakes: It could be seen clearly that most of the respondents have much to learn from their mistakes. Feeling most and moderate having the same amount of trend while feeling slightly and none at all are in a small trend comparing to the other three

- I am getting all the help I need: As same as most of the trends, moderate comes with the highest trend for the respondents getting all the help on what respondents need. The following trend comes with much and most. But some feel slightly getting the help they need and very few respondents feel none at all.
- I am easily depressed: Again, the highest trend is feeling moderate on easily being depressed. Slightly, none at all, much comes in a similar trend but there are some respondents do feel most on easily getting depressed.

Happiness score คะแนนความสุข

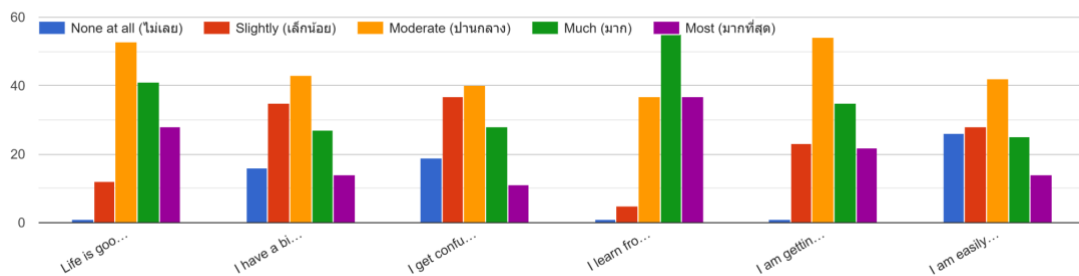


Figure 14: Happiness score of the respondents

This graph presents the importance of family, friends, teachers, and social media. The choices are not important, neutral, somewhat important, and very important.

- Family: It can be seen that the majority of the respondents choose the choice very important for their family. Only a few have chosen somewhat important and neutral but very few have chosen not important.
- Friends: Similar to the trend of family, respondents have chosen very important as the highest trend. Some respondents have chosen somewhat important and neutral but somewhat important in higher than neutral. A very few have chosen not to be important.
- Teachers: Respondents have chosen teachers as a neutral for how important for the respondents comes in the highest trend. The following trend is somewhat important which is higher than very important. Although, some have chosen not to be important for teachers.
- Social Media: The trend of social media is similar to the trend of teachers. By having neutral as the highest trend. The following trend is somewhat important which is also higher than very important. Though, some of the respondents have selected social media as not important, which seems in contrast to nowadays society.

How Important are the following to you? ให้ระดับความสำคัญต่อหัวข้อเหล่านี้

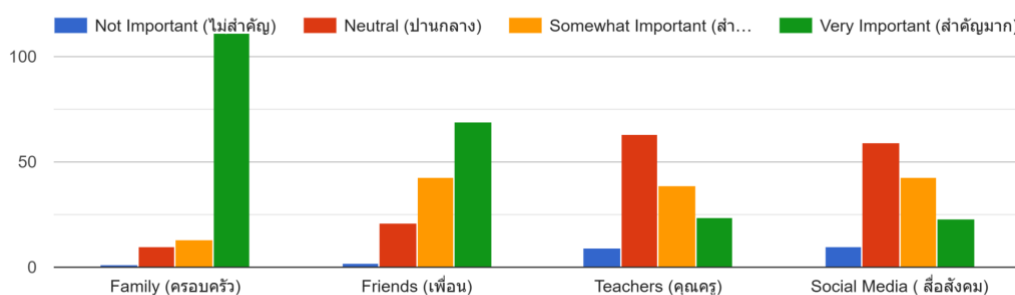


Figure 15: How important the respondents view family, friends, teachers, social medias

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore how the presence or absence of role models influences academic and social outcomes among adolescents in Thailand. The survey findings revealed that adolescents **without** role models reported a slightly **higher interest in education** (mean = 3.55) compared to those **with** role models (mean = 3.44). At first glance, this outcome may appear counterintuitive, as role models are commonly perceived to have a positive influence on youth motivation and goal-setting.

One possible explanation for this result lies in the **type of role models** selected by the participants. The majority of adolescents in this study identified **celebrities, artists, or social media influencers** as their primary role models. These public figures often achieve success through avenues that appear detached from academic achievement, such as beauty, fame, or online popularity. According to research by Choi and Pak (2006), when adolescents admire celebrities who emphasize appearance, fame, or financial success over academic accomplishments, this can lead to **distorted values** and **reduced academic motivation**. Similarly, Gibson (2004) noted that role models who achieve status through non-educational means may inadvertently lead youth to **undervalue formal education**, especially if success is perceived as attainable through talent or luck rather than sustained academic effort.

This explanation aligns with **social cognitive theory**, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through observing others (Bandura, 1986). If adolescents consistently observe role models who succeed without emphasizing education, they may internalize the belief that education is not a critical factor for success.

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that **not all role models exert a negative influence** on education. Numerous studies suggest that **academic or professional role models**—especially teachers, parents, or older peers—can foster a strong commitment to learning. For instance, Lockwood and Kunda (1997) found that exposure to inspiring role models who achieved success through education can **boost self-efficacy and motivation**, particularly when the individual perceives the role model as relatable and attainable. Moreover, adolescents who view their role models as hardworking and academically accomplished often strive to emulate those qualities (Oyserman et al., 2006).

The findings from this study indicate that adolescents who reported having a role model exhibited **lower levels of engagement in risky behaviors** such as smoking and alcohol consumption (mean = 1.14), compared to those without role models (mean = 1.20). This supports the notion that **role models can serve as protective factors** in adolescent behavioral development.

One possible explanation lies in the **nature and type of role models** identified by participants in this study—most frequently celebrities, artists, and idols. Many celebrities, especially those active in youth-oriented entertainment industries, are conscious of maintaining a positive public image due to their careers being dependent on public perception and sponsorships (Stever & Lawson, 2013). As such, they are often seen engaging in health-promoting behaviors or advocating against substance use.

In contrast, adolescents without role models may lack such external guidance or behavioral standards. This absence may increase their vulnerability to peer pressure and experimentation, particularly during adolescence—a developmental period characterized by identity exploration and risk-taking tendencies (Steinberg, 2008).

However, it is also important to recognize that **not all role models promote positive behaviors**. Some celebrities, especially those who gain notoriety through controversial actions, may actually glorify or normalize substance use (Brown et al., 2005). While this was not reflected in the current sample, such cases serve as a caution against generalizing the protective effect of all role models.

The findings from this study reveal that adolescents who reported having a role model scored higher in self-confidence ($M = 3.59$) compared to those without a role model ($M = 3.48$). Although the numerical difference is

modest, it suggests a meaningful trend that supports existing literature: having a role model is positively associated with self-confidence among adolescents.

Role models play a crucial role in adolescent development by providing a reference point for setting goals, navigating challenges, and forming personal identity. According to Lockwood and Kunda (1997), exposure to successful role models can inspire individuals and enhance self-perceptions, particularly when individuals perceive similarities between themselves and the role model. This inspirational effect can enhance adolescents' beliefs in their ability to succeed, which is a core component of confidence.

Furthermore, research indicates that role models often serve as “psychological blueprints” that adolescents may emulate, especially in contexts of perseverance, self-discipline, and emotional resilience (Yancey, Siegel, & McDaniel, 2002). When adolescents witness their role models succeed through hard work and persistence, it reinforces the belief that similar outcomes are achievable for them too. This aligns with Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that observational learning from competent models can strengthen one’s confidence in their own ability to perform certain behaviors.

In contrast, adolescents without role models may lack clear aspirational figures, which can lead to uncertainty about what is possible for them to achieve. Without such external sources of motivation or affirmation, these individuals may experience lower confidence, especially in settings where they face social pressures (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). They may internalize doubts or question their abilities, particularly in the absence of affirming narratives that validate their aspirations.

However, it is important to note that the influence of a role model on confidence can depend on the type and quality of the role model. For instance, if a role model is perceived as too distant or unattainable (e.g., a celebrity whose lifestyle seems unrelatable), the impact on confidence might be neutral or even negative (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009). This indicates that not all role models boost confidence equally; relatability, shared values, and perceived attainability are key factors.

The findings of this study indicate that adolescents who reported having a role model experienced higher levels of happiness ($M = 3.44$) compared to those who did not have a role model ($M = 3.26$). Role models often serve as sources of emotional support, aspiration, and motivation. When adolescents admire and identify with role models, particularly those in media or public life, it can stimulate feelings of hope, purpose, and connection. These emotional experiences are closely tied to neurochemical processes involving **dopamine** and **serotonin**, two neurotransmitters significantly associated with well-being and happiness.

Dopamine is often referred to as the “reward” neurotransmitter. It plays a crucial role in the brain's reward system by reinforcing behaviors that produce pleasure or satisfaction (Palmiter, 2008). For adolescents, observing a role model succeed, overcome challenges, or simply engage in aspirational behavior—whether in person or through media—can trigger dopamine release, leading to feelings of enjoyment and increased motivation (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2015). These neurochemical responses may explain why the presence of role models, particularly those who are admired or idolized, contributes to higher happiness scores.

Similarly, **serotonin** plays a key role in mood regulation and emotional stability. Adequate serotonin levels are associated with increased mood, calmness, and emotional resilience, while deficiencies are linked to depression and anxiety (Young, 2007). Role models who display emotionally stable and resilient behavior may indirectly promote similar psychological states in adolescents by offering behavioral templates that foster emotional regulation and adaptive coping mechanisms.

However, some literature suggests that **not all role models produce positive emotional outcomes**, depending on the nature of the modeling relationship. For example, when role models are perceived as **unattainably successful** or when adolescents engage in **social comparison**, it may lead to feelings of inadequacy or reduced self-esteem (Festinger, 1954; Vogel et al., 2014). In such cases, the presence of a role model may paradoxically diminish happiness if the adolescent feels inferior or pressured to emulate unrealistic standards.

5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that the presence of role models is associated with several positive developmental indicators, particularly in reducing engagement in risky behaviors, enhancing self-confidence, and improving overall happiness. However, the study found that adolescents with role models reported a slightly lower level of academic interest than those without role models. This may be influenced by the type of role models identified — many participants listed celebrities and online influencers as their primary inspirations. While the present study supports the idea that having a role model is associated with positive developmental indicators in adolescents, it is important to recognize that the *type* of role model and the *context* of the relationship significantly shape this outcome. This study underscores the importance of encouraging adolescents to engage with role models who exhibit values aligned with personal growth, education, and long-term well-being.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: This study has not used any generative AI tools or technologies in the preparation of this manuscript.

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